WRITING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

When do you write a research proposal?

You write a research proposal to summarise a project and get it approved before progressing. Sometimes this is done:
- when applying for a scholarship,
- when beginning a coursework/research degree, or
- when applying for a research grant.

Why do you write a research proposal?

Your proposal helps to clarify details of your research project.

For **you**, it helps to identify:
- what you are investigating,
- how you will investigate it,
- if the project is viable, and
- why your research is important.

For a **committee/supervisor**, it helps determine whether the project is:
- feasible in terms of scope, resources and time frame,
- original,
- significant,
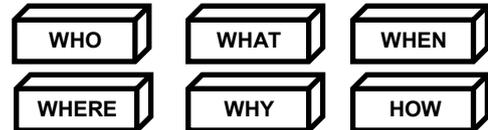- relevant, and
- appropriate for your degree type.

Your aim is to persuade readers that your research is worth supporting.

A research proposal will vary in length. It could be three to nine pages, plus references. Always check the outline and speak to your supervisor.

TIP

If your proposal is for a grant application then you should look at previous successful submissions for inspiration.

Building your research proposal:

| WHO | WHAT | WHEN |
| WHERE | WHY | HOW |

Ask yourself...
- Who is taking part in the data collection?
- What is the scope?
- When will you be collecting data or writing your chapters?
- Where will your research be collected and stored?
- Why is your research significant?
- How will you conduct the research?
- What is your central aim or question?
- What are you arguing or testing?

It is important to distinguish between your aim/question and your hypothesis/thesis statement. For example:

Topic
Examine the impact of enforcing hybrid vehicles in Australia.

Aim/Question

(what you want to find out)

The aim is to explore how enforcing hybrid vehicles in Australia can increase the country's Climate Change Performance.

Thesis Statement [Humanities]

(a position taken in an argument)

Hybrid vehicles should be enforced by the Australian government to reduce the country's ecological footprint and gain a higher ranking in the Climate Change Performance Index.

Hypothesis [Sciences]

(a proposition that can be tested)

It is hypothesised that enforcing hybrid vehicles will decrease Australia's ecological footprint by 20% in the next decade.

How do you structure your proposal?

Here is a guide to what you should include. It may vary depending on your discipline. Please check the proposal requirements for your degree type and area of study. Also discuss with your supervisor.

Project Title
- Roughly no more than 20 words.
- Use keywords that explain what, where...
- Should be intriguing and direct.

1.0 Introduction
- Begin with a welcoming sentence that touches on your topic broadly.
- Provide brief general background on your topic and establish the problem being explored.
- Mention the 'gap', i.e. the area your research will fill or expand on. Explain why your research should be done.
- Insert your thesis statement/hypothesis.
- Outline the methods and themes covered in your research.

1.1 Aim and Objectives
- State what you are aiming to achieve.
- List roughly 3-5 specific objectives. These should be directly achievable.

1.2 Scope and Limitations
- What is the scope of your research? Are there any limitations in terms of location, demographics, time etc.

1.3 Significance
- Outline how your research is different from the research published and why it is important to explore this topic.
- What impact will your research have?
- Who will benefit from your research?

2.0 Literature Review
- Divide into thematic subsections.
- Define key terminology.
- Cover the major issues and key theories.
- Mention controversies and compare literature (see Writing a Literature Review Survival Guide).
- Establish your theoretical framework.

3.0 Methodology and Methods
- Explain what methodology you are using and why you have chosen it. Back this up with references to literature.
- What specific methods will you be using? e.g. interviews, surveys…

(See Methods and Methodology Survival Guide)

4.0 Budget
- Outline the costs associated with your study and what resources you have available to you.

5.0 Timeline
- Provide a timeline, which shows when you intend to do all the necessary aspects of your research.
- It should include data collection, writing, editing, conferences etc.
- There are many timeline templates you can adapt; find the best one for you.
- Use a colour coded system.

(See Planning a Research Project Survival Guide)

References
- Include in-text references and a reference list in your discipline's style.

TIP

Write academically, but avoid jargon. Your proposal should be easily understood by a non-specialist. Do not overuse 'I' or 'we'.